Mari: *History of History*

The idea of compiling a history book of Mari was initiated in 2017 by the current managing director Lieutenant General Ishfaq Nadeem . Major Amir Bilal (retired) who is part of the media cell since 2010 formulated the team and the outline of the book. I was contacted in June 2018 and on 15 July 2018, had a meeting with Lieutenant General (retired) Ishfaq Nadeem Ahmad to get the outline of the book. His idea was to have a book which should be neither lengthy nor too short and should be in a style that an ordinary person not related to oil and gas should also find it worth reading. My own interest was to more academic- to know about the petroleum company, a modern company, how it works and thrives? What are its ethics and culture? How safe is this industry? As personally I have always treated even ordinary home use gas cylinders with a respect as equal as to a shell.

I had heard about ~~the~~ Mari when it was a gas company and like so many others always wondered as what does this name stands for. I have never been so close or inside an oil and gas company thus like Alice in Wonderland I observed and had many questions. Luckily Lieutenant Colonel Tariq Butt (retired) who is heading the security department in Mari was my adjutant when I reported in the regiment back in 1984. Through him, I gathered answers to my everyday queries. It was a pleasant surprise to know that himself, Major (retired) Amir Bilal and Lieutenant General (retired) Nadeem are school fellows (Saint Mary's Rawalpindi).

As the days turned into weeks, I found Mari as very efficient and precise. I met secretary of the company Mr Asad Rabbani and found him to be very cooperative, he is in this post for last almost a decade and half. I learnt with observation and experience that, within the two office blocks you cannot roam freely, you require access to enter into every office, you need a pre arrange appointment for any query; all hallmarks of a professional company. In the wake of terrorism wave since 2005 almost every major company has been hit directly and indirectly by the militants thus these security steps at Mari Headquarters are obvious signatures as how seriously the Mari undertakes this aspect. Security guards are deployed around the buildings and in carpark area as well; it gives a mind a peace and resultantly concentration is more on the work.

Mari, is a blend of military and civil way of working, as the managing directors are retired army generals thus they bring the rich culture of army into the company. Contrary to common perception, army life is vibrant, lively, open minded and liberal in every aspect. Thus in Mari, I found through the pictures, the family galas being arranged at Murree and Mangla , with tug of war competitions in which MDs are also taking part, picnics at Karachi beach hut and celebrating Women's Day in which male members are also taking part. The working culture of Mari is interesting; it is a blend of east and west, modernity and

conservatism. On every Monday, the management wears Mari's tie and ladies adore a Mari Scarf as part of the dress and on Friday everyone wears traditional dress of shalwar kameez; as a routine they adhere to closed collar dress policy. There are breaks for prayers and a dedicated place at the basement of old block acts as mosque. There are annual iftaar parties for all the staff members in the lawn of the Block No.2.

Dharian and Ghauri

In the last week of November 2018, I visited Dharain and Ghauri fields, major consideration was that both rigs of Mari were in operations at both the fields.

Early in the morning at given time the vehicle arrived, it was a pleasant surprise to see the well-mannered driver who was adhering by the traffic laws and also wearing seat belt. It looks a very ordinary act but in our culture this adherence to laws and time is a rare thing and it infact sums up an organisation's culture as well.

It is at the field area that one fully appreciates the HSE of Mari; the first impression of a rig area is that of professionalism and then safety. I just walked around and a commanding voice shouted us to get back. I had crossed the invisible line without wearing the safety equipment and stepped into the domain of Tool Pusher. Later myself and Hasan were both given briefing by the HSE officer, we signed a document, were issued with safety eye wear, boots and only then allowed to get closer to the rig. There are two main persons at the rig, one is known as Company Man who is as name implies is a man from company responsible for everything other than the rig. Other person is Tool Pusher, he is incharge of the rig operation. Apart from these two, there are geologist, doctor, HSE officer and few other men. Overall it is a well organised place where everyone is moving in a very specific manner.

Mr Butt, Tool Pusher of the Rig explained the different types rig operations. There is no institution in our country which trains rig operators, thus one learns through on job experience; the current rig operators are mainly those who were trained in the Persian Gulf region. There is a fifteen member team which operates a rig, they can mantle or dismantle it within seventy two hours. Rig transportation may involve over hundred truck loads and thus has to be precise and professional.

All the operators wear blue clothing whereas management staff wears khaki dress. The camp office is well laid out in two rows, there is a web connection being set up by the company itself thus real time data flow to head office. The living area is within a stone throw distance?, there are rows of air conditioned containers for living , two separate dinning containers, these all are supplied and operated by a contractor who also provides laundry and other facilities. Food quality is excellent and service admirable. Rota, is the short name for rotation system. The entire crew works on Rotation, meaning that they spent thirty days on site and ten days on leave, Mari provides them free tickets right uptill the their home. Rota have different scales, for abinitio and new comer it is sixty days of working and ten days leave and then it increases to forty five days' work and fifteen days off and finally it can reach fifteen days work and equal days of rest. Thus at site, I observe absolute absorption of

men in their work. Rig itself never sleeps thus shifts of eight hours around the clock.

After having a sumptuous lunch and let me add that items on table including olives (black and green), sauces (mint, chilly, tomato), mustard, tobbassco, pickle, were more than offered at any restaurant in Pakistan. We drove back to main G.T Road and onwards to Ghauri Field . There is a short cut also available but we preferred the proper route. Ghauri Field is not far from Dharian, one has to take a side road and a drive of half an hour to reach the site where Rig-2 is in operation. This site is much more established than the previous; however the layout remains the same. We were again briefed about the HSE, there was a sadqa ceremony in process, we also offered our prayers. Apart from rig which was undergoing some maintenance, there were two other major piece of equipment, the Thraedliner trucks. They are also used in drilling. -**Ghauri was the very first well in Punjab drilled by Mari and also the very first oil well of Mari**; it was this very discovery which changed the nomenclature of the company. Close to the Rig-2, is the mausoleum of Shahb Ud Din Ghauri with an excellent architecture, serenity, beauty and peace. It was sunset, thus a look at the horizon and one goes down the historic nostalgia. The view is commanding and there is no reason or logic to disagree that it was the main route at that era. Alexander the Great must have also passed through the same territory.

Daharki

There are daily flights from Islamabad to Sukkur and from Karachi to Sukkur as well. Myself and Hasan boarded the Pakistan International Airlines Fokker flight for Sukkur, which departs at 1530 and arrives at destination at 1745 hours, when we landed at Sukkur almost half an hour in advance due to tailwinds, there was a company's double cabin along with driver and a Frontier Constabulary guard. It took us close to two hours of careful drive to reach Mari Field Headquarters at Daharki. Much has change on the main national highway, there is a cardiovascular hospital at Sukkur, a new university Aror is under-construction, a new cadet college at Ghotki was inaugurated four odd years ago. All along the road there is heavy traffic coupled with the numerous two and tri wheels.

Along the highway, ; first comes Engro power plant, then the Qadirpur gas field, then Fauji fertilizer plant, then Engro plant and next to it is the Mari offices and colony. The sight itself is visible from miles due to a red flame from the highest tower in Pakistan.

Mari's residential colony at night is peaceful with people walking on the well-lit roads Driver after passing through two security checkpoints dropped us in front of the guest house. The overall atmosphere in the colony is that of a well-disciplined, professional and educated community. The guest rooms itself speaks of Mari's standards, the presence of fire extinguishers even in the room and in hallways -along with first aid kits and instructions for evacuation in case of fire are all bit unusual for our culture and lifestyle. This is the silent contribution of Mari in bringing an awareness about the ever present dangers of fire.

In the morning, the view is breath-taking, tall date and palm trees, flower laden and decorated houses. First stop was hospital but before that let me add, the driver Allah Dino

came wearing blue shirt and blue jeans and before he drove he puts on the seat belt and drove with extra care. The hospital of Mari is neat, clean and efficient. It is modern in every sense of word, digital entry meters, smiling receptionist and spotless floors. I was taken around the hospital, the X ray department, dental clinic, laboratory, lady doctor and so on. There were few patients; I was informed that after mid-day the doctors' move on to the field clinics and also on alternate days they attend far flung mobile clinics as well. Doctors instead of wearing traditional white coat wear Khaki jacket and trouser, the standard Mari management dress. In the entire colony and offices, one witness only khaki and blue dress.

Mari Grammar School (Mari Petroleum Higher Secondary School)

Mari Grammar School is now almost a quarter of century old, without any hesitation, I can write with confidence that it is among the very best schools of the country. The vast green playground next to the school adds beauty and provides ample space for sports activities. The inter house Girls cricket tournament was in play. Principal Mr Mazhar took me for a round of the school, the newly constructed four rooms for pre-school children are worth visiting, the layout, pattern, style of teaching and the passion of teachers is worth appreciating. The art and craft room is most appealing as it is housing delicate and priceless works of children. There was an inter house debate in process. School auditorium is under renovation and soon it will be operational. The best part of this school is that it is not merely a school rather a concept. Children are allowed an extensive break for an hour at noon, during which they go back to their homes which is walking distance and consume lunch. In the evening there are supervised sports, then prep for an hour. During prep hour, which is held in homes, no children are allowed to come out of their residence. All the teachers are having good education and teaching experience from renowned schools of Pakistan, each is provided with free accommodation and a handsome salary. Mr Farrukh is a second generation Mari employee, his father also served in Mari and he himself grew up at Daharki and now he is a teacher in the same school from where he started his own learning career.

Mari Gas Field- HSE at its very best

Lieutenant Colonel Khizer (retired) is the incharge of health, safety and environment(HSE at Daharki); he is from Army Aviation, he gave me a detailed briefing and later we drove out to the wells , rig and gas field alongwith another geologist Mr Jawwad who is a second generation Mari employee. HSE is paramount and is obvious everywhere, the boldly written Muster Points, which are the rallying point in case of emergency are at prominent place, above all it is the adoption and adherence to safe life which is most obvious here, wearing of seat belts by drivers, slow driving, proper road marking are all hallmark of safe driving culture. The area around Daharki Mari Colony is green with single metallic tracks connecting various villages, this road was also constructed by Mari, our driver Raju is also a second generation Mari, his father was in management. Raju highlighted various points of interest along the journey. The water level in the area is a matter of concern for the district administration and as such rice crop is treated in the same tone as poppy cultivation on the western frontier; it is absolutely forbidden. Our double cabin drove carefully with Raju at the

wheels, we first had a brief stop at Well No.8. The chowkidar at the well is old but very vigilant and strict in enforcing all the laid down policies. Lieutenant Colonel Khizer was much impressed with his sense of duty and gave him an instant cash prize, although not much in monetary figures but very high in terms of acknowledging the man's sense of responsibility.

Being a desert frontier town , the over 900 Kilometres square area is Mari's responsibility in every sense, population of almost fifty thousand bonded with tribal bloodline dating hundred of years in antiquity are much more dependent upon Mari than on any other institution of the state. With few exceptions, it is the well which has acted as catalyst , as a magnet , as a hub to the population to settle around it. Mari has built roads and tracks, it is an operational necessity for the company as it has to move its heavy rigs and other associated equipment to all over the area. These tracks are compressed, raised and watered with river source almost daily when water is available in the season. Mari at its own has dug a water channel which now not only serves its purpose but also benefits the thousands of people living in the area. There are green fields astride the tracks, at some places at others simply water logged fields. In the fields one can observe women and man working together; man to operate the tractor and all other chores being left to the women like sowing and reaping of cotton crop. Women are dark skin with medium height , men are also having same colour only the built is much heavier, almost all men have beard and more than often it is dyed. Sindhi cap is an integral part of the male culture and so is the ajrak. Womenfolk have bangles and coloured glazed with mirrors chunri (cotton shawl). Talking to a shopkeeper later, I inquired about the bangles popularity among the women and he highlighted that it is a custom in certain tribes. Among the women more specifically among the Hindu, a virgin wears bangles in both hands, so does a married , but a widow adores either one arm or remains barren on both; white colour is more traditional, in the past these bangles were made of elephant and camel bones but now glass is more common and economical.

We passed through few small goths and reached Dad Laghari, a mother and child care centre is being operated by Mari. It is only after driving through the area and having witnessed the local population living and working, that one really appreciates the importance and value of such modern medical complex on the very edge of the civilisation. The complex is in a modern building, white washed, tiled, sanitised, organised with an air of welcome and well-being; the only such structure that I have seen since morning when we left Daharki. Doctor Shabnam a gynaecologist is incharge, she travels daily with company vehicle and nurse from Daharki for her duty. She gave an introductory tour and later allowed to observe her dealing with her patients. There are high technological equipment and a well trained staff to operate. Dr Shabnam highlighted and shared her experience. ' *majority of the women are pleasant to interact, they get married at early age and have quite a number of offspring, eight, nine and ten children are quite common, maximum I have seen are nineteen. Birth control or use of contraceptive is almost rare and this is where the role of lady doctor becomes important. In the area the male are supposed to get married at least twice in their life cycle and there is nothing taboo in it.*' Dr Shabnam further highlighted that in many cases, there is nothing wrong with the patient but coming here and talking to a lady doctor is

a social encounter and women of the area do look forward. We as a practise discourage excessive administering of sedative medicines as sooner or later it becomes addictive in nature, explained Doctor Shabnam. This philosophy of mental grooming of the patients is shared by almost all doctors of Mari; the patients culturally are accustomed to having more and more of medicines, more as a social pride than medically required. Dr Channa highlighted, '*We tell them that excessive medicines are injurious to health, at times; patients apart from getting medicines from us also buy it from market with end result of getting sicker than before. It is only then, that they come to us and confess that, what we told them in the beginning regarding medicines and its side effect is true*.' All doctors are fluent in Sindhi, Urdu and English languages, are highly qualified and have good temperament and skills. Doctors in this part of the country are performing multi role tasks; they are doctors in medical sense but also a father figure, advisor, confidants and friend in true sense. These hospitals and clinics are operated and managed through international standards; all medicines are from high end and kept in refrigerators around the clock.

Mari Deep Central Processing Facility is an amazing place in every sense, at first it gives a look of an orchard , while driving through it resembles a boulevard laden with thick green trees. This oasis in the desert is the very heart of Pakistan's fertiliser industry and in turn the very lifeline of our agriculture. Engineer Aqeel is in charge at the time, an engineer in true sense of word. He while walking, after a mandatory HSE lecture and with safety headgear, narrated how this works. This is the place where all the gas from the deep reservoir Goru-B is gathered and further distributed. At the moment, a routine check and maintenance is underway. On my appreciation of the greenery, he acknowledged and narrated ' *in the beginning it was all barren without any tree, pure sun in the summer . We worked and also planted trees with the same zeal and enthusiasm as we have in drilling. Now the average temperature has dropped drastically in the complex and it is good for the equipment*.'

Local Marriage

I also attended a local wedding ceremony, kind of Mr Ayub the resident manager that he took me along in his own official vehicle; all in all there was a convoy of half a dozen Mari vehicles and everyone was attending, there was an escort of constabulary as well.

Mr Ayub, a graduate of Lahore's University of Engineering and Technology highlighted that the relationship between Mari and locals runs much deeper than what is commonly expected from a company and surrounding population. Mr Ayub further highlighted, that in last twenty odd years there has been only one incident of any item being stolen from the Mari's wells in the area and all this is attributed to this cordial self-respecting equation between a billion US $ company and a poor local. Mari is not merely a company in ordinary sense; it is seen as a kind of patron and saint among the locals, the schools, dispensaries all add to this faith. Mr Ayub also elaborated the steps taken to enhance the environment in the area, most common and most useful and long-lasting is plantation, excessive plantation keeping in view the mortality rate. On my query as what was the most difficult task he has undertaken so far, Mr Ayub without any hesitation recalled the drilling operation they

undertook in 2016 in the deep desert. It was difficult because of rig movement, the sand dunes were too soft to bear the weight of transportation thus we had to strengthen the track , and that made it something special , in the end, the drilling itself was not worth commercially viable; however the experience is something which not only I cherish but all of the Daharki staff feel proud of their achievement.

The Resident of Mari holds a special place among these villagers and tribesmen, in this part of world as anywhere else pomp and show is a prerequisite for being taken seriously. We finally reached the destination, a well-lit place seen some distance otherwise there were so many turns involved in this hour long journey that an ordinary person is bound to lose the way. The wedding ceremony is the son of a poor peasant who over decades of working as chowkidar and as contractor has been able to build his own 'goth' and now this being the very first such event in his family , he invited all the management of Mari and this was very kindly accepted by them . It was all sand when we stepped down and from this point onward Mr Ayub was received by the father of the groom and I joined other colleagues. As we entered the marquee, well-lit with generators, all the people presented roses and greeted us. The host had put up his -best to make this event a memorable one, even arranging singers. A female singer sang beautifully in Sindhi language, she had an entire orchestra comprising of tabla and harmonium players. Occasionally the men would get up, whirl around a five hundred rupee note over the head of the groom and then threw it in air and a young lad from the singer's entourage would catch it before it lands on the carpet. Overall it was very graceful and enjoyable event, sealed water bottles was the only drink available and no smoking inside the marquee. Food was served in the adjacent portion, there were few chairs for the guests and there were no spoon or anything of this sort, pure local food. We bid goodbye soon after the dinner, on return journey, I sat with Major retired Taj, and Lieutenant Colonel retired Khizar; Major Taj was on the steering and soon we lost our way but managed to find our way back without any panic; it just highlights how easy it is to get lost in the desert.

Draft of the book was presented to the MD in December 2018 and he generally approved it with few changes and it was again put up in February 2019. The two major events took place in between, first was the visit of Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Bajwa to the Mari Head Office in January 2019. This was the first ever visit by any COAS to the Mari, thus it is a historical event. General Qamar Bajwa appreciated the performance of the Mari Petroleum Company; he also interacted with the Mari's hockey team and gave them few good tips. The other important event was the Mari's annual function which was held at Serena Hotel and Minister of Petroleum Mr Chaudhry Ghulam Sarwar Khan was the chief guest. It came as a very good pleasant surprise to see the minister being so well informed about the ministry and petroleum issues; really impressive. A good dignified, lively, well-orchestrated affair attended by a majority of the management with their families. There were few ambassadors and high commissioners also present as the guest.

Mari celebrates National Days with zeal and pride, Iqbal's Day, Birthday of Quaid-e-Azam, Pakistan Day, Independence Day, Defence Day all are celebrated with an aim to keep the spirit, pride, dignity alive and to pass it on to the next generation. Independence Day on

14 August 2019 was special as Mari showed its solidarity with the people of Kashmir, who were under the brutal clampdown from Indian Government after it had removed their special constitutional status

After having spent a year at Mari, I became part of it. The culture and working environment are professional; it starts at 0800 hours and precisely at 1600 hours the pack up starts. There are air conditioned buses and vans for employees and this by itself is a great relief in a city where driving is more stressful than the actual work. In the time, Hassan the photographer was posted to Halini, Lieutenant Colonel (retired) Tariq Butt had availed the yearly recreation ex-Pakistan leave with his wife to Turkey. Mari as a policy offers a yearly return ticket for two to Turkey. Media Cell also shifted from old block to a new building across the road. In the winter of 2018-19, Tulips were planted for the first time at Mari and coming weeks were spent in eagerness and finally much to the relief of gardeners they blossomed; almost everyone had a selfie with them.

Lunch at Mari is a special event, without any exaggeration of words, it is simply the best food experience in the twin cities, the ambience, hospitality and above all the quality of food is excellent. The security guards at Mari are all ex-servicemen and as such daily interaction with them reminds me of the regimental life. The trio of Miss Adeela, Mr Tahir and Mr Ghawash all from Business Department of Mari were instrumental in reading the draft and highlighting mistakes and offering valuable suggestions. Book is in debt to them. The proof reading is a convoluted affair more so when it is done through computer, few mistakes are removed and in the bargain few more are inserted and it seems an unending affair.

Regarding pictures used in this book, majority of them are from the Mari's own archive, Mr Azhar Hafeez, Mr Nadeem Ghouri, Mr Hassan of Media Cell and Major (retired) Tahir Kayani have contributed, especially the latter's aerial pictures of Balochistan.

No amount of words can encompass the support given by the Media Cell of the Mari. Major (retired) Amir Bilal is a source of inspiration in every sense; he is soft, very cordial yet very firm in his dealing. He is involved in this project from the inception and showed great patience. At the end of this project, in July 2019, he underwent a personal tragedy when his wife departed for eternal abode. Funeral was a family affair in which not only the Mari's present and retired employees at Islamabad but management from Daharki who had travelled by road were present to offer their sympathies and to shoulder the sorrow. To me it highlights the very spirit of Mari; it is not merely a commercial company it runs as a family.

In the end this book would not have been possible without the patronage of Lieutenant General (retired) Ishfaq Nadeem Ahmed Hilal-e-Imtiaz (Military) the present Chief Executive and Managing Director of Mari Petroleum Company Limited. He was appointed as MD on 26th January 2017. He was commissioned in January 1980 in an Azad Kashmir Regiment, he is a graduate from Staff College Camberly (U.K) and National Defence University, Washington (USA), commanded a strike corps and also remained as Chief of General Staff of Pakistan Army. Lieutenant General (retired) Ishfaq Nadeem also remained as the Colonel Commandant of Azad Kashmir Regiment.

Author. Major Retired Aamir Mushtaq Cheema was commissioned in September 1984 from Pakistan military academy in an Anti Aircraft Regiment (58 MAA). He later earned his flying brevet and served in fixed and rotary wing squadrons apart from faculty of Army Aviation School. After retirement in 2008, he pursued an educational career, gaining a Master of Letters Degree in History from University of Glasgow. Presently he is Ph.D Scholar at national defence University Islamabad. He has authored *Royal Air Observation Corps 1935-1956. An Illustrated History of North Waziristan Militia 1895-2012. An Illustrated History of Chitral Scouts 1903-2014. An Illustrated History of Khyber Rifles 1878-2015. An Illustrated History of Pakistan Rangers 1957-2016. An Illustrated History of Cobras 1985-2019.* He co-authored *An Illustrated History of Pakistan Army Aviation 1947-2007.*